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Students are *Signaling*

How to Listen and Act

Today's Presenters

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Framing the Conversation

Why Signals Matter *Now*

They've always mattered; what's changed?

+

Recruitment approaches are changing.

The shift from volume to precision in higher ed marketing.

+

Student preferences are changing.

The diversification of audiences and modalities and thus interests and needs.

+

Ways students signal are changing.

Student intent is communicated in more places than ever but it's simultaneously getting harder to directly track signals.

+

Reliance on data is changing.

The real risk isn't lack of data; it's being overwhelmed by, misinterpreting, or under-using it.

Define *Signals*

What do we mean when we say students are signaling? What are they telling us?

+

Indicators of Who the student is.

Use these indicators to shape **the what** and **the why**.

+

Indicators of How close the student is to acting.

Use these indicators to shape the **what's next**.

"People don't want to be sold to. They want to be understood."

Jill Konrath, Sales author and strategist

Signals about the *Person*

Core Dimensions
to *Listen* For

- **Academic Identity:** Program interest, exploratory versus declared

- **Motivation and Values:** Career-driven, mission-driven, outcomes-driven, experience-driven

- **Decision Style:** Research-heavy versus quick validation, independent versus influence-conscious

- **Constraints:** Price sensitivity, geography, modality, timeline

- **Stage of Self Discovery:** "I'm figuring out who I am" versus "I know exactly what I want"

Translating into *Storytelling.*

Move from one institutional story to **multiple entry points.**

Discoverers → reassurance, pathways, flexibility
Decided students → depth, differentiation, proof
Values-driven students → mission, impact, belonging
Career-driven students → outcomes, employers, ROI

Personalize more than the subject line.

Shape the **narrative**.

And *it works.*

When we gather, quantify, and target based on the person, we see results:

+ Avg. Pro:Inq rate (54.47% v. 16.43%)

+ Avg. App Completion rate (93.40% v. 90.48%)

+ Avg. Admit to Deposit (37.2 days v. 54.1 days)

Personalization isn't about being clever—it's about being **relevant.** It's capturing these person-level signals and acting on them.

"Behavior happens
when motivation, ability, and
a prompt converge
at the same moment."

BJ Fogg, PhD, Stanford University, Fogg Behavior Model

Signals about
the *Intent*

Intent is *behavioral,* not demographic

Repetition and **acceleration** matter more than single actions. *Look for:*

\+

Frequency

\+

Recency

\+

Progression

\+

Relativity

High-value intent signals

- Returning to the same content multiple times
- Engaging with application, visit, or financial aid content
- Switching from inspiration to logistics
- Responding across multiple channels

Common Mistakes

- Treating all engagement as equal
- Over-weighting one action without context
- Confusing curiosity with commitment

Acting on Intent Signals

Right **message**, right **moment**, right **channel**

High Intent ↑
Accelerating

urgency, reassurance, next steps

Fluctuating Intent
Exploring

clarify fit, social proof, outcomes

Low Intent ↓
Fading

reduce friction, build confidence, answer "why"

And *it works.*

When we gather, quantify, and target based on intent, we are:

+ 94% accurate in determining likelihood to apply

+ Prospects/Inquiries: 50x more likely to reach a student that will apply.

+ 93% accurate in determining likelihood to enroll

+ Admits: 14x more likely to reach an enrollee

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"Theories are only useful to the extent that they inform action."

Chris Argyris, Harvard Business School professor

Tactical
Techniques

Capture Student Signals

We told you the what
but here's the *how*

Store these data points in fields, interaction codes, and general CRM-standard constructs

→ Geodemographic markers

→ Timestamps of activity

→ Frequency of activity

→ Ping and/or Google Analytics on webpages

→ Student-provided data on forms

→ Deliver / Campaign data

→ Time to action / conversion

→ Cross-channel connectivity

→ Types of content consumed

Score Student Signals

Let's make it quantifiable

Basic

→ Look at historical conversion on key metrics and weights of those variables

→ Apply weights to variables
→ Basic score

Note: Not as scientific as no weight caps or variance on repeating variables.

Advanced

→ Extract 3 years of historical data

→ Use machine learning and/or AI and logistic regression to calculate precise variable weights

→ Apply those weights AND the time since / between those actions AND the relativity to peers in the cohort

→ EnGauge Score

Act on Student Signals

Make data-driven decisions

Spend limited resources - your time and money - efficiently and effectively with *prospective* students

→ Calls

→ Travel

→ Print

→ Texts

→ Digital Ads

→ Personalized Videos

Act on Student Signals

Make data-driven decisions

Spend limited resources - your time and money - efficiently and effectively with *current* students and *future cohorts*

→ Narrowed focus and efficiency

→ Retention as a consideration for enrollment pipeline development

→ Intelligence for predictive modeling

→ Driving conversions more effectively

→ Targeted management within a cohort

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Student Signals
Best Practices

Things to keep in mind

→   Ensure scores update in real time

→   Ensure users know what to do with the scores and signals

→   Ensure scores change as behavior changes

→   Ensure scores are easily accessible (In your Slate instance)

**Bringing
It Together:
From *Signals*
to *Strategy***

"Synthesis is not the accumulation of facts, but the integration of ideas."

Jerome Bruner, Cognitive Psychologist and University of Oxford Professor

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The intersection of
person + intent

- Who they are tells you *what* to say

- Intent tells you *when* to say it

- The overlap is *intentional segmentation*

Organizational
Implications

- Better alignment between marketing, admissions, and enrollment ops

- Fewer "one-size-fits-all" campaigns, ensuring students feel seen, heard, and supported through their journey

- Smarter use of staff time and budgets

Final
Reframes

- Students are already telling you what they need

- The institutions that win are the ones that listen and act

- This will pay off - cycle after cycle

Resources

[Crafting a Strong Brand Strategy Has Never Been More Important To Sustaining Your Enrollment](#)

[Product Feature: Personalized Digital Experiences](#)

[Personality Science in Higher Education: Building a Humanized Brand](#)

[Product Feature: Carnegie's EnGauge Scores](#)

[Summer Research Series: Personality in Storytelling](#)

[Smooth Transitions: Strengthening the Handoff from Admissions to Student Success](#)

Thank you.

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